



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Scope and Content of the Three Year Course of Teacher Training

SIXTH REPORT OF
THE NATIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL
ON THE TRAINING AND SUPPLY
OF TEACHERS



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FOREWORD

By the Chairman of the Council

THIS report is a sequel to "Three Year Training for Teachers," the Council's fifth report, published in September 1956. There the Council reproduced the statement of the educational advantages of the three year course and the advice on the timing of its introduction, which it had given to the Minister. Before going on to consider the scope and content of the longer course, the Council sought the views of area training organisations, as representing a wide range of educational opinion. Their replies have been considered by the Council and form the basis of this report. The report itself, however, is the expression of the Council's views alone.

No final judgments are, or can be, made here, but, now that the Minister has announced his decision that the three year course should be introduced in 1960, the time has come to start detailed planning in the area training organisations and in the colleges. The Council is publishing this report in the hope that it will help in this process.

P. R. MORRIS

July, 1957

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Note :—The estimated gross cost of the Report is £101 - 10 - 10 of which £39 - 5 - 0 represents the estimated cost of printing and publishing the Report.

I. THE NEED FOR A LONGER COURSE

1. The two year course in the training colleges has always been overcrowded. The studies and activities required of the students in college and the claims of school practice have left too little time for necessary reflection and general and social interests and activities. The need to acquire knowledge under pressure of time can make learning a barren experience, and induce uncritical and unenquiring attitudes of mind. The McNair Committee, which accepted in 1944 the case for a three year course on very much the grounds set out here, accurately summed up the situation thus: "under present conditions students do not mature by living: they survive by hurrying". Moreover, most students have not by about twenty years of age, the age at which they normally go into the schools as qualified teachers in charge of a class, reached a maturity equal to the responsibilities which fall on them.

2. Furthermore, during this century, more has come to be required of the public educational system, and in particular that it should provide an education fitted to the individual needs of each child and pursuing far wider than purely utilitarian objectives. These requirements, with their implication of a longer school life, are given statutory force in the Education Act, 1944. They make new demands on the teachers. If the teachers are fully to meet these demands, the greatest need is that they should be better educated men and women. Such men and women will be, by that very fact, better teachers.

3. If the present two year course of teacher training has been able to achieve its original strictly limited objective only by means of strain and hurry, it cannot hope to achieve this much wider one. Thus there is a two-fold justification for extending the course. The educational case for doing so is overwhelming.

II. THE CALIBRE OF THE STUDENTS

4. Fortunately, the circumstances in which the longer course is introduced should make it possible to raise the standard of entry to college and so contribute to an improvement in the standard of training. Ever since normal peace-time recruitment began after the war, it has been necessary to find very large numbers of teachers as the large numbers of children born after 1944 have come into the schools. These teachers have had to be found mainly from the comparatively small numbers of children born in the 1930s, and some sacrifice of quality has therefore been inevitable. In the early 1950s, it was not possible to fill the available training college places with qualified applicants. More recently, recruitment has improved, but it has been—and still is—necessary to ask the colleges to admit as many students as they can.

5. The outlook will be very different in a few years. By the end of the 1950s, larger age-groups will be reaching the age of eighteen and the proportion staying on at school is likely to continue to grow. Moreover, at that time the total school population will start to fall. It is worth remembering that the introduction of the three year course will itself reduce the intake of the present two year colleges by one-third. Thus, whereas in 1955 the general



colleges could be filled only by the admission of practically all qualified and suitable applicants, it is reasonable to expect that, from 1960, there will be severe competition for entry to college, and that consequently it will be possible substantially to raise the standard of entry. There will no doubt still be a wide range of ability and attainment among students, but it is likely that, in selecting students for admission, colleges will be able to give greater weight than at present to the capacity of a student to pursue his own education with independence and judgment. This will be a major step towards the goal of a teaching profession, in which all members, regardless of the type of school in which they teach, are either trained graduates or worthy of equivalent status in the profession.

III. SCOPE OF THE COURSE

6. The introduction of the longer course and the prospect of smaller numbers and a higher standard of students provide the opportunity to review the whole training given in the training colleges and to create a new course, the aim of which will be to send better educated men and women into the schools. To this end the training colleges should develop more of the qualities which have become associated with university education, and indeed with all mature study. Thus, a student's work in his special field or fields will make some of the same demands as university study, and in addition he will receive a general education which will depend on the quality of his college as an educational community.

7. One of the chief needs is to give students more time at their own disposal, free of commitments arranged for them. If all the extra time is used for instruction, teaching practice and other compulsory activities, the new course will be no different from the old taken at a more leisurely pace and the students will not learn to study for themselves or acquire, by their own efforts, mature standards either of scholarship or of professional technique.

8. More uncommitted time can mean more time for discussion, for reflection and for extra-curricular cultural interests. If the study of the main subject(s) (see paragraph 11 below) is to be carried out satisfactorily and at a proper standard, more time must be given to it. At some point in the course it may be desirable that a student's attention should be concentrated on it for a period of at least some weeks, and that during this period other activities undertaken by the student should be compatible with this concentration. The problem will be to limit demands for time for the less essential activities, and to concentrate on putting first things first. More time should be found for field work and for making contact with industry and with social services and it will be important to take full advantage of the two long vacations.

9. What has been said has been concerned with the personal education of the student in the belief that a better educated person will be a better teacher. But there is another aspect of the matter to be considered. Training colleges have important vocational functions to perform. The student is being trained to teach in a school, and the college is equipping him to take his place on a school staff. In addition to possessing the necessary attitudes and professional skills, the newly trained teacher must have adequate knowledge of the subjects he is going to teach. Consequently, the range of subjects taught in the colleges and the numbers taking them must be related to the needs of the schools. As a general proposition this will command ready acceptance; in practice, however, a balance has to be

maintained between full academic freedom on the one hand and too rigid insistence on vocational training on the other.

IV. CONTENT OF THE COURSE

10. The training college course is not simply made up of a number of separable elements. The colleges should, and do, offer each of their students a course planned as a whole which is greater than the sum of its parts. In treating the component parts of the course separately, as this report does, it is possible to obscure this principle. The idea of the course as an integrated whole is fully accepted, but, for the purpose of presentation, it is necessary to discuss in turn in the paragraphs which follow the principal ingredients under the headings of main courses, curriculum courses, education courses and teaching practice. This expedient should not however be taken to mean that in practice these ingredients are separable.

Main courses

11. The chief purpose of the main subject(s) is to carry further the personal education of the student ; and, if the new course is to meet the requirements of the teaching profession and to prepare students effectively for work in the schools, they must have an opportunity to continue their personal education by taking one or more main subjects with the most mature approach and to the highest level of which they are capable. An important contribution to the education of the men and women in the colleges will be made by requiring them to undertake the discipline of concentrated study of a particular defined subject which will fully extend their ability. This must not, however, be taken to imply that no objective standards should be established in main subjects. On the contrary, it is important that recognised and defined standards, which will be higher than at present, should be set ; indeed the setting and definition of standards will be a major and continuing task. With better students, the attainment in one or more main subjects of a standard nationally acceptable and of a quality comparable with that in the universities becomes a reasonable objective, and the schools will be able to count on recruiting teachers who possess a real depth of knowledge and intellectual maturity.

12. There will be general agreement with what has been said about the importance and the function of the main subject(s), and it will be apparent that main courses will have a particularly strong claim on the time available during the longer course. While an early choice of main subject(s) may be desirable, it may not always be practicable for a student to choose and embark on it at the very beginning. But, once he has done so, he should be able to devote much of his time to it throughout the three years.

13. There are different views about both the number of main courses which a student should be expected or required to take, and about the types of subject which are suitable for study as main courses. As to the former, the choice before area training organisations in framing their regulations and before the colleges in providing courses will, generally speaking, lie between one and two, as indeed it does at present. Probably no one figure will, or should, ever command universal acceptance as the solution for all students.

14. The list from which main subjects are to be chosen will, clearly, have to include not only all those subjects which are commonly taught in schools but others also which are rarely or never found on school time-tables, among

them some directly connected with the study of education. There will, however, be certain subjects which are hardly suitable for students who take only one main subject because taken alone, they contribute too little to the student's intellectual maturity or narrow his field of study unduly. The problem of choosing subjects which are free from these objections is not, however, a new one ; it has already engaged the attention of those concerned with the training of teachers (notably the area training organisations) and it will doubtless receive the further close study which the introduction of the three year course requires.

15. The student must have the maximum freedom of choice, though he may also need guidance, in the selection of his main subject(s). But this freedom cannot be absolute, for the student is being trained for a career of teaching in the schools. It follows that the needs of the schools must influence the training he is given. Taking the country as a whole, the spread of subjects in the colleges must be related to the subjects taught in the schools, and, within wide limits, the number of students taking a subject must be governed by the number of teachers of that subject the schools need. What has been said implies some degree of planning, both within the area training organisations and nationally. For practical reasons, and in particular because certain main subjects require scarce staff or expensive equipment, a certain amount of such planning is in any case inevitable.

Curriculum courses

16. While study of the main subject(s) is an important element both in the personal education of the student and in his professional training as a teacher, there must be other elements in the course if students at the end of it are able to enter with confidence upon their work in the schools. It will therefore be necessary to continue in some form the present system of courses designed to give students a general grounding in a range of subjects which they are likely to have to teach. The term "curriculum courses" is used in this report—from among the many terms now in use—to describe these courses.

17. The range of subjects taken must be flexible in order to cater for the varying needs and interests of the students and the needs of the type of school in which the student hopes to teach. On the other hand, while the different needs of primary and secondary schools must always be borne in mind, the training of many students should not be so sharply differentiated in this respect that they have to take the major decision about their career at the very beginning of their course. There is a real dilemma here, and only experience will resolve it. Ideally, the choice between a wider range of curriculum courses and few such courses taken further should depend on the inclinations and intentions of the student. Moreover all arrangements made in the colleges should so far as possible be compatible with mobility of teachers between different types of school.

18. Curriculum courses, then, may be expected to refresh and repair a student's previous knowledge, to carry his study further in a way which emphasises the educational value of the subject to children and gives him some understanding of what they can be expected to achieve in it.

19. English and mathematics are two subjects of special importance in the context of curriculum courses. (In some cases, Welsh must be added.) The ability to use words, both spoken and written, is an essential part of a teacher's equipment, and it must be a main aim of the schools that no pupil should leave without having acquired it. It will be generally agreed, therefore,

that the schools are entitled to expect that any trained teacher shall have had a substantial course in English (and Welsh, in some cases).

20. Mathematics is both a necessity in ordinary life, and of increasing importance to an understanding of the physical universe. While it is claimed, by some, that there are students who have neither the ability nor the aptitude to study mathematics with profit or, later, to teach it effectively, there is nevertheless general support for the view that a course in elementary mathematics is a reasonable requirement for all students and that the schools are entitled to expect them to have competence in number as in words.

Education courses

21. A study of education, in a wide sense, is the core of the training of any teacher and the student is introduced to the subject in many ways. In the lecture room he becomes acquainted with the principles of education and the history of educational ideas. Partly as a result of direct observation of children, he becomes familiar with their nature and needs and the extent to which these are subject to the influences of the environment in which they live. Similarly, he studies how children of various ages learn and what they are capable of learning. He acquires some knowledge of the growth of the educational system in England and Wales and its present organisation. Lastly, and equally important, every student is brought to face some of the philosophical problems of education and some of the social implications of teaching and of being a teacher.

22. Thus the course in education is wide and exacting, and entails much reading and thought, much discussion in tutorial group and seminar. It need not, however, require, in the longer course, a more than proportionate increase of time allotted to it. Because of the rigorous nature of the education course, many of the more difficult aspects should be reserved for the third year, when the student is more mature.

Teaching practice

23. It is generally agreed that it is not possible within the two year course to spend as much time as is desirable on teaching practice. On the other hand there is danger in uncritical acceptance of the need for very much more time. Much practical skill must perforce be acquired after the student leaves college, but the student who does not come to grips with fundamental educational problems in college may never do so. Consequently, those responsible for planning courses in detail will be well advised to scrutinise carefully, in the light of the purposes served by teaching practice, the amount of time which should be allotted to it.

24. Teaching practice should form a gradual introduction to practical teaching. It may begin simply with visits to schools and other educational institutions, some of them perhaps unusual or doing challenging work. At this stage it is important that the student should spend some time observing under guidance. He may help a serving teacher with a class or take charge of a small group of children who can be seen as individuals. There should be opportunities for contact with individual children spaced over a fairly long period. If teaching practice and visits to schools are seen as a continuous process with a common aim, the relevance of both to the theory of education and to practical child study will become apparent. Later in the course longer continuous periods in a school will be more appropriate, to give the student a chance to develop a closer relationship with a group or groups of children, and to make his own mistakes (and to retrieve them).

V. ORGANISATION OF THE COURSE

Staffing

25. Much of what has been said in this report about more advanced main courses, about freedom and flexibility, about private study and discussion and about the needs of the schools will make great demands on college staffs. Members of staff will need to have high standards both of scholarship and of adaptability. In the last analysis, the value of the training colleges, like that of any other educational institution, depends on their staffs. It is therefore of great importance that colleges should use the period of notice before the longer course is introduced to improve the quality of their staffs. In some cases there may have to be new appointments, even sometimes in advance of vacancies. In others there may be value in various arrangements for staff to have time and opportunity for further study.

Range of courses

26. Educationally, there can be little doubt that the fullest value of the longer course can be realised only in colleges which are substantially larger than many of the existing colleges. Considerations of cost point in the same direction. On both counts 150 students is, in the Council's view, the absolute minimum satisfactory size for a three year college, and it would like to see all reach 180. Still larger colleges would be ideal. Accordingly, the future of the smallest colleges will have to come under review. On the other hand, it will take time to make much real progress with the most desirable rationalisation of the present training college system, and it is inevitable that a three year course will have to be conducted for some years in colleges of more or less the present size, in other words in colleges which are in many cases too small. Detailed planning must take this fact into account.

27. Part of the answer to this problem lies, whatever the size of the colleges, in the acceptance of some limitation on the number of subjects in which they provide main courses. There are dangers in such a limitation. If it is carried too far, the quality of education in the colleges will be seriously impoverished. On the other hand, it must be recognised that it will be quite uneconomic for every college to offer main courses, perhaps each for very few students at any one time, in the whole range of subjects. It will indeed not be possible for a college to be all things to all students.

28. There is a further point. When the number of main courses provided is limited in this way, it will be, to an important extent, before admission that students will exercise their freedom of choice of course. Ways therefore will have to be found to make known to students the range of subjects offered by individual colleges. For not only will the college be selecting the student, but in future, in a more crucial sense than at present, the student will be selecting the college, guided in part by the range of courses it offers.

29. The problem of finding the right place for each student will not, however, be easily solved, nor can it be expected that the right choice will always be made. Consequently, the possibility must be envisaged that it will be best for a student to change his course by transferring to another college. The problem will be to weigh the value to the student of continuity and of completing the course which has been conceived as a coherent whole against the possible benefits of a transfer. Transfers will always present practical difficulties, but these must not be regarded as insuperable in the few cases where they provide the only answer to the student's problem.

30. What has been said about limitation of range of courses and about transfer leads naturally to the problems of those specialist institutions other than training colleges (e.g. colleges of music) which help to meet the needs of the schools for specialist teachers of certain subjects. They will no doubt continue to do so after the introduction of the three year course, though perhaps not to the same extent. It is not easy, however, to envisage them becoming fully recognised training colleges. The better pattern will be that some of their students complete their teacher training by attendance for a period at recognised training institutions. Alternatively in some cases, the reverse process may be preferred, namely, that after a period at a training college some students take their special study further at a specialist institution. The exact form of co-operation may vary in different subjects, but a clear and important distinction will need to be made between fully recognised teacher training colleges on the one hand and certain specialist institutions on the other.

Planning of courses

31. The point has already been made that the need to adjust training college courses to the needs of the schools implies some degree of planning. In the same way the limitation of main courses provided by individual colleges needs to be co-ordinated, both locally and nationally.

32. Fortunately the necessary machinery for planning and co-ordination is available in the area training organisations. During the less than ten years of their existence they have provided a forum for discussion and opportunities for co-operation between colleges without which the country could not with any confidence proceed to the solution of the dilemma presented by the need, on the one hand, to provide the training college student with the personal education best suited to his abilities and aptitudes, and, on the other, to meet the varying requirements of the schools. The introduction of the three year course will mark a new stage in their development. If they use their opportunities and discharge with distinction their difficult functions of planning and co-ordination, they will gain in stature. They can play a decisive part in making this new chapter in the history of teacher training a success.

33. The area training organisations cannot, however, fully discharge their functions in isolation. Some colleges have other affiliations which cut across area training organisation boundaries (for example, with the religious denominations which support them). Moreover some area training organisations have few constituent colleges and these do not provide a sufficient basis for a balanced provision of courses. Lastly, many of the necessary statistics are available only at the Ministry. In teacher training, as in other parts of the educational system, the Ministry has the responsibility for national planning and policy. In recent years it has been able to count on the advice of the National Advisory Council on the Training and Supply of Teachers, which is widely representative of all who are concerned with the employment and training of teachers. Both partners in this central machinery have worked closely with the area training organisations and the colleges. The success in finding solutions to the many difficult problems of the past which this co-operation has made possible augurs well for the discharge of the responsibilities in planning which lie ahead.

VI. SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

34. (a) Better educated teachers are needed than can be trained in the present two year course. With the longer course it will be possible to send better educated teachers into the schools. (Paragraphs 2-3.)
- (b) The standard of admission to training colleges is likely to rise substantially in the 1960s, and it should be possible, in selection, to give greater weight than at present to a student's capacity to pursue his own education with independence and judgment. (Paragraph 5.)
- (c) The three year course offers an opportunity to recast teacher training and to introduce into it more of the qualities of mature study. (Paragraph 6.)
- (d) Students need more time at their own disposal, in particular for study of the main subject(s). (Paragraphs 7-8.)
- (e) The range of subjects taught and the numbers taking them must be related to the needs of the schools as well as the personal education of the students. (Paragraph 9.)
- (f) The separation of the training college course into its component parts is necessary for the purpose of presentation, but it does not, and should not, correspond to a separation in practice in the colleges. (Paragraph 10.)
- (g) There should be scope for the student to take his main subject(s) to the highest level he can reach, but there must also be recognised and defined objective standards of attainment. The setting and definition of standards is one of the major tasks ahead. (Paragraph 11.)
- (h) Different views are held about the number of main courses to be taken. Certain subjects are not suitable for students who take only one main subject. (Paragraphs 13-14.)
- (j) The student should have maximum freedom in the choice of main subject, but this freedom must be limited by the needs of the schools. (Paragraph 15.)
- (k) Curriculum courses should vary in number and depth according to the student's abilities and intentions. They should be flexible and not rigidly differentiated according to type of training. They should emphasise the educational value of the subject. (Paragraphs 16-18.)
- (l) Every student should have a substantial course in English (and, in some cases, Welsh). (Paragraph 19.)
- (m) There is general support for the view that a course in elementary mathematics is a reasonable requirement for all students. (Paragraph 20.)
- (n) The education course is the core of the student's training. It does not, however, require a more than proportionate increase of time allotted to it. (Paragraph 21.)
- (o) There is no case for a greatly increased allotment of time to teaching practice. Teaching practice should be a gradual introduction to the schools, and integrated with education, with child study, and with curriculum courses. (Paragraphs 23-24.)

- (p) The value of the training colleges depends largely on the quality of their staffs, on whom the longer course will make new and heavier demands. (Paragraph 25.)
- (q) Educationally (and on grounds of cost), it is desirable to have larger colleges than at present, but planning must take account of the fact that rationalisation of the present system will take time. The future of the smallest colleges will have to come under review. (Paragraph 26.)
- (r) Colleges will have to limit the number of main courses they provide. Consequently choice of college will be an important element in the student's freedom of choice of main course. (Paragraphs 27-28.)
- (s) The problems of transfer need further discussion. (Paragraph 29.)
- (t) The role of the specialist institutions other than training colleges will need consideration. The solution does not lie in recognising them as training colleges. (Paragraph 30.)
- (u) The limitation of main courses provided by individual colleges will have to be co-ordinated by area training organisations and nationally. (Paragraphs 31-33.)